

## Column – A remnant in a world of apostacy

The importance of one or two should not be discounted. Indeed, “remnant” – a small number which remains faithful -- is a biblical concept and has especial relevance in today’s world, a world in which cultural relativism seems rampant in many local congregations and denominations.

In the Bible, for example, only a comparatively small number of those Judeans who were carried captive into Babylon in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. came back to their homeland when Cyrus the Great in 539 B.C. issued a decree making this return possible. This remnant rebuilt Jerusalem including the Temple, thus setting the stage for the coming of Jesus some 490 years later.

But even earlier, we find in the Bible the story of one man standing up against the apostacy of the wicked King Ahab and his equally wicked wife Jezebel. His name was Elijah. Elijah lived in the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and staged a great showdown with the prophets of Baal in which Yahweh (Israel’s God) was the indisputable winner (1 Kings 18:20-40).

After that great triumph, Elijah went off by himself and had what we would call a “pity party.” Famously, he said: “I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left” (1 Kings 19:10). Of course, that was not entirely true, but that is how he felt. Even so, he had courageously played the role of the faithful remnant.

Moving to the New Testament, we find the touching story of two older people – Simeon and Anna -- who recognize the infant Jesus as the promised Messiah when He was presented in the Temple 40 days after his birth (Luke 2:22-40). The Temple, as we later discover, was under judgment and in A.D. 70 would be utterly destroyed. Yet, there was true faith in that place. Simeon was moved by the Holy Spirit to come into its courts. Anna was a regular. We are told she “departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.” Both Simeon and Anna were attuned to God’s purposes and looked for the fulfillment of the prophecies found in the scriptures.

The importance of the faithful few remains significant today. A few years ago I had a call from a man in another state. He was in a quandary whether to leave the church he attended, as it had in his view left the Gospel behind and had lapsed into apostacy.

As our conversation continued, I discovered he taught an adult Sunday School class. Covertly he was bearing witness to the truth found in scripture. Should he leave? My question to him was, “Who would feed those sheep if you left.” In the end, I think he stayed, at least until he could be sure those souls were safe.

All of which to say, God can use an army, but never discount the value of the remnant, even one or two.

*O GOD, who as at this time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit; Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God,*

*world without end. Amen. (Collect for Whitsunday – Pentecost, the Book of Common Prayer.*

*The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Church, Blue Ridge.*